

## CHAPTER I

CITIZEN S. Y. RABINOVICH, a gynecologist by profession, had unlawfully procured an abortion. As he leafed through the notes of the interrogation Vladimir Petrovich Globov frowned fastidiously. He had finished his night's work, the sun had risen, and now, here was this obscene character, with a name out of a funny story, crawling out of an unnumbered, battered file. Scarcely a job worthy of the City Public Prosecutor.

He had already had occasion to prosecute at least one Rabinovich, if not two or three. Indeed, there were too many of them to remember. Every school-boy knew today that these people with their petty-bourgeois instincts were born enemies of socialism. There were exceptions, of course—Ilya Ehrenburg, for example. But as against that, you had only to think of Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev, Kamenev, the rootless cosmopolitans . . . people with an inborn love of treachery.

He felt a small pain in his heart. He unbuttoned his coat and shirt and squinted at his chest. There, under the left nipple, next to the scar left by a kulak's bullet, was a blue heart pierced by an arrow. He stroked the old tattoo marks; they went back to his youth. One heart—the one transfixed—dripped pale-blue blood; the other ached gently from fatigue and the cares of office.

Before going to bed the Public Prosecutor stood for a short while at his window and surveyed the city. The streets were still deserted. But the policeman at the crossroads was, as usual, directing the traffic. At a wave of his conductor's baton invisible crowds surged forward or stopped dead.

The Public Prosecutor did up all the buttons of his uniform and raised his hand. He felt: "God is with us"; he thought: "Victory is ours!"

The rain streamed down Karlinsky's face. His socks were sticking to his feet. "I'll give her five more minutes," he decided, "then I'll go." But it was too much for him and he started for home.

"Where are you off to, Yury?" Standing in the wet square, Marina looked improbably dry. "Chivalry is dead, I see." She smiled with an imperious gentleness and pointed to a dry spot beneath her umbrella. "Come here at once."

"Good morning, Marina. I'd given you up. The policeman was getting restless, wondering if I meant

to take advantage of the cloudburst to blow up Pushkin's monument."

Marina laughed. "First I have to make a telephone call."

The rain beat down and ricocheted on the asphalt. The square was a sea of bubbles. The telephone booth was an island. They dashed toward it, braving wind and water. Yury surreptitiously dried his hands on Marina's waist. "You smell like a wet rag," she said. Before he could take offense she had dialled her number and said "Hello," with a foreign intonation. "Hello," she said again, pronouncing the melodious, exotic word with a sulky tremolo on the top note.

"Is that you, Vladimir? I can't hear you." To hear better she moved closer to Yury. He could feel the fragrant warmth of her cheek.

"Speak louder! What's that? What? Don't wait dinner for me. I'll be back late—I'm dining out."

The receiver gurgled helplessly. Her husband was protesting at the other end of the line. Yury took Marina's hand and kissed it. He forgave her everything: his waterlogged shoes and the fact that she was unapproachable. Her voice was as insinuating as a serpent.

"Do go to the concert tonight. Yes, without me. Please! I'll explain later. . . . What's that? Oh yes. . . . I too."

She was deceiving her silly, trusting husband.

"How did you like that, poor old Public Prosecutor!" thought Karlinsky. "She said, 'I too' to avoid saying, 'I kiss you too.' That was because I was standing beside her and touched her hand!"

"What are you so pleased about?" she asked in a surprised voice as she hung up the receiver. Karlinsky was behaving just as she had expected.

"Dear Marina, may I be indiscreet and ask you one thing that's been puzzling me for ages . . ."

"Two if you like." She was resigned and bored.

Yury had time to think: "You're a cunning devil, but I'll outsmart you yet," before speaking in an ingratiating tone: "Do you believe in Communism? And secondly, since you don't mind: do you love your husband?"

"Hell, they've cut me off"—Globov breathed into the artificial silence of the telephone, but there was nothing further from Marina. In the next room Seryozha was conjugating his German verbs.

"Seryozha! Come here a moment."

"Did you call me, Father?"

"Hard at work, are you? I've finished mine. Worked like a beaver all night long. . . . Look, will you keep me company? It's my day off after all. We'll have a gossip and then go for a drive. Then tonight we'll buzz off to the concert. What do you say to that?"

“What about Marina?” (Marina was Seryozha’s stepmother.)

“Your mother’s dining with a friend. Well? Do you agree?”

Seryozha made no objection.

“One thing I meant to ask you, Seryozha . . . I went to the parents’ meeting at your school last Wednesday. There was a lot of talk about you. All to your credit, as usual. Only afterward, the history teacher—what’s his name?—Valeryan . . .”

“Valeryan Valeryanovich.”

“That’s it. . . . Well, he took me aside and whispered something about having to be careful: ‘You know,’ he said, ‘your son keeps asking awkward questions and, in general, he shows signs of a morbid curiosity. . . .’”

The Prosecutor paused, then, as Seryozha said nothing, asked casually:

“Is it women you are interested in, Seryozha?”

Seryozha glowed with an unbearable pink light. Just like a girl, thought his father fondly. He knew that Seryozha’s sins were of a different order, but since, for educational reasons, he wished him to own up, he went on with the inquisition:

“Well, there’s no harm in thinking about women now and again. I was quite a lad at your age—the brightest in the village, I might almost say . . . But why discuss it with your teachers? Couldn’t you have asked me . . .”

"But it wasn't that at all," Seryozha burst out. "I asked something completely different."

"Really."

"Of course! I asked him about history . . . and philosophy; about just and unjust wars, for instance."

"Wars?" Globov looked amazed; he still pretended to understand nothing. "You're not joining the Army next year, are you? What about college?"

Seryozha rushed into explanations. No shameful thought had even crossed his mind. As for the teaching on just and unjust wars, it had originated with Marx and had later been developed by Lenin, who applied it to the new historical setting. To prove his point Seryozha ran to his own room and brought back several notebooks covered with his minute writing.

"So what I couldn't understand was Valeryan Valeryanovich's saying that Yermak's conquest of Siberia was just, and so was the crushing of Shamil's rebellion. . . ."

"Yes," said Globov thoughtfully, "we can't do without Siberia. Nor without the Caucasus. Oil. Manganese. You know the folk-song? 'Upon the peaceful bank of the Irtysh, Yermak sat deep in thought.' Remember?"

"And when the English conquered India, they also . . ."

"You stop making such comparisons," cried

Globov in alarm. "What have the English got to do with it? Where do you think we're living? In England?"

He thought for a moment. Really England was quite irrelevant. Why England?

"But historically speaking . . ."

"Historically speaking my foot! Study your history but don't forget the present day. Think of what we're building! Think of what we have achieved already! Well, there you are— In the final reckoning, if you see what I mean—ultimately—our ancestors were right. What they did was just."

Seryozha's father was right but Seryozha felt sorry for Shamył. After all, how could Shamył know the Revolution would take place in Russia? All he wanted was to free his own people, it was only afterward that it turned out to be wrong, and even antisocialist as well. . . .

"Karlinsky now, he explains it differently. He says it all depends on your point of view. One man's justice is another man's injustice. But where d'you get *real* justice then?"

Karlinsky again! Globov suppressed a curse. "You leave all this hair-splitting alone, Seryozha. Karlinsky is a learned man, of course, and he's a good friend of Marina's . . . but you don't have to take everything he says. . . . Now then, let's have it all from the beginning: what other questions have you been pestering your teachers with?"

"It all depends on your point of view, my dear Marina. Let's examine yours."

Karlinsky puffed at a cigarette (it was his favorite brand) and watched Marina eat. A small, provocative birthmark set off the dazzling whiteness of her skin, but already her cheeks sagged a little and there was an ominous fold under her chin.

She bit into a cake, baring her gums to avoid smudging her lipstick.

"Marina!"

Her face was blank; she turned it slowly, displaying it from every side.

"As we are friends—we are, aren't we?—I'll take the risk of speaking frankly. It's not for love . . ." He lowered his voice; at the next table two young men were stolidly sipping cognac. . . . "I mean: it wasn't out of love of country and of Communism that you married your husband, was it? You, who are so clever and so beautiful . . . You know that you *are* beautiful?"

"I know." She smiled faintly with amusement.

"And clever?"

"Yes, I know."

"I love talking with you. It's like eating spiced tomatoes. And the atmosphere in this café encourages frankness. It's colorful, isn't it?"

Yury pointed with his chin, inviting her to look around. One of the young men at the next table insisted stubbornly: "I adore the clink of glasses."



His friend crossed himself with the piece of ham stuck on his fork, swallowed the ham, and added: "A woman's body is an amphora filled with wine."

"Isn't it time we filled up our amphoras?" said Karlinsky. "But what shall we drink to? To the ideals you are so determined to keep dark?"

Marina shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm no good at talking about abstractions, my dear Yury."

"What about personal things, then?"

"Even less."

"I see. . . . You like riddles. It's true that every pretty woman likes to be mysterious. But it's dangerous to be too frank with you, Marina. You are a terribly good listener."

"Yes."

"You watch, and you remember everything, and later . . ."

"No, I don't always remember, but I always understand."

"I wish I did."

"What don't you understand?"

"Well, take your beauty, for example. How you can . . ."

"How can I, beautiful and clever as I am, live with my husband? Is that what you mean?"

Karlinsky froze. Soft-footed, with bared teeth, his prey advanced upon him. Fox, mink, or long-awaited silver sable?

The two young people at the neighboring table were now pouring out their hearts.

"Honestly, Vitya, in all my life I've never harmed a fly."

"Thank you, Tolya, thank you for your understanding."

"So you want to go in for law, Seryozha? A very sensible idea. Following in your father's footsteps? Good for you. . . . But honestly, all your doubts and questions aren't worth a kopeck. All these talks you have with your Valeryan Valeryanovich are just childish nonsense. You're not old enough to understand State affairs. Take those former prisoners of war, for instance, that you stick up for. Believe me, they're all cowards and traitors, and I know what I'm talking about. And then, what you said about wages. I suppose you'd put a Cabinet Minister on the same footing as a cleaning-woman and expect him to run the country for three hundred rubles a month? Do you imagine you and I know better than the people up above? Here you are, still conjugating German verbs and taking down philosophy notes, while they've discovered everything there is to know, they've summed it all up and worked it out to the last detail—including why you need your German verbs and your philosophy and what you'll do with them.

"Get one thing into your head. What matters is

our Glorious Aim. And it's by this you have to measure every other thing—everything, from Shamyl to Korea. The aim sanctifies the means, it justifies every sort of sacrifice. Millions of people—just think—millions have died for it. Think of the cost of the last war alone! And now you come along and quibble about details—‘this is wrong and that's unfair’!

“Let me tell you a story. I'll never forget it as long as I live. There was a captain in the war who had been ordered to capture a hill. His men were tired and discipline was slack, nobody felt much like getting himself killed. Just then a man was brought in—he'd been caught as a deserter escaping from the battlefield. The captain shot him out of hand in front of everybody, sent up his report, and led his unit into the attack.

“Well, we get the report. We investigate. And what d'you think we find? The man wasn't a deserter at all. Another officer had sent him somewhere with a message, and the captain either hadn't known or he forgot in the heat of the moment.

“Naturally, we send for the captain. What does he think he's doing? Arbitrary measures! Shooting people without trial! Give him hell! Send him to a punitive battalion.

“Well, as it turned out, the captain was no longer among the living, he'd been killed in action.

“What were we to do now? Shame a fallen

officer before his men? Make them lose their confidence in their commanders? When, for all you know, it's just because he shot the fellow that he was able to control his men and carry out his orders.

"Remember, the hill was captured! The enemy was driven back. Frankly, at the time I looked at what had happened from that hilltop. And now you try and have a look at it. Well, budding Public Prosecutor, what's your verdict?"

"I don't want to be a prosecutor."

"Oh? You'll be an attorney will you, like Karlinky? You see yourself making brilliant speeches for the defense?"

"No, I'll be a judge."

"I give in, I give in without a struggle, dear Marina. I entirely agree with you. The end justifies the means and the higher the end the more it justifies them. How strikingly you put it. 'Innate beauty is not enough, its victory must be won in battle.' So an experienced general hides behind this Renoir exterior! I'd never have known it! I'll tell you what, enroll me in your army. Beauty needs worship, the end needs means. Let me be the humble means of your all-justifying beauty. You won't regret it."

Karlinky and Marina clinked glasses.

"Will you accept my offer?"

"I don't know. Let's talk about something else."

Marina's mind was wandering. Yury's was captured by an image from his distant childhood. The clever serpent handed a pink apple to a fair-haired Eve while Adam snoozed under a bush in paradise. To complete the picture, he pushed the bowl of fruit toward Marina.

"Try a peach, Marina. One should always eat a peach after a sweet wine."

The fat cloakroom attendant bustled, skipped, and even limped out of politeness. He was much older than Seryozha's father, yet when Globov took off his hat and threw down his galoshes he fell upon them, hugged them to the gold braid on his breast, and muttered, turning like a top and adding fond diminutives to every word: "Hat . . . galoshes . . . check . . ."

Seryozha and his father went into the concert hall.

Music scores and violin bows stirred. The impresario, a failed *Wunderkind* bald from an excess of musical exertions, glided into the footlights and, almost like an incantation, carefully articulated all the honorific titles of the renowned conductor. The concert began.

Seryozha watched the orchestra as the trumpeter, who had ginger hair and looked like a boxer, blew out his cheeks and the violinists frantically waved their arms.

The music flowed. It oozed like oily, rainbow-patterned puddles. It rose. It roared and stormed off the stage into the body of the hall. Seryozha thought about the cloudburst in the streets outside and wriggled with pleasure. The music reproduced his private image of the Revolution. The flood drowned the whole of the bourgeoisie in a most convincing way.

A general's wife in evening dress floundered, tried to scramble up a pillar, and was washed away. The old general swam with a vigorous breast stroke but soon sank. Even the musicians were, by now, up to their necks in water. Eyes bulging, lips spitting foam, they fiddled frenziedly, at random, below the surface of the waves.

One more onslaught. A lone usher, riding on a chair, swept past. The waves beat against the walls and lapped the portraits of the great composers. Ladies' handbags and torn tickets floated among the jetsam. Now and then, a bald head, white like an unripe watermelon, slowly floated up out of the sonorous green depth and bobbed back out of sight.

"What music!" exclaimed Globov. "That's not Prokofiev or Khachaturian for you. That's real classical stuff."

He too was fascinated by the flood but he understood it better than Seryozha. What struck him was that the flowing music wasn't left to its own devices, it was controlled by the conductor.

The conductor built dams, ditches, aqueducts, canalizing the capricious elements in accordance with his exact blueprint. He directed the flow; at the sweep of his arm one stream froze, another surged forward in its bed and turned a turbine.

Globov slipped into the front row. Never had he been so close to the conductor, never had he realized how hard was the conductor's work. No wonder! Think of having to keep an eye on all of them, from flute to drum, and force them all to play the same tune.

The conductor streamed with sweat, his jowls shook, his chest heaved hoarsely at each pause. From a distance he looked as graceful as a dancer who used arms instead of legs to dance. But here, close up, he was a butcher hacking carcasses and chopping ice, grunting out his short, thick breath at every stroke.

Louder and louder rose the music. Streams and waterfalls were no longer flowing—they had long since frozen: icebergs floated down, as if the ice age had come back, and crashed and ground against each other.

“Intermission!” announced the youthful-looking impresario in a ringing voice.